

Into the Blue Again by Ember Nickel

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Horror, Supernatural

Language: English

Characters: Will B.

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-07-29 08:58:47

Updated: 2019-07-29 08:58:47

Packaged: 2019-12-12 16:51:58

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 717

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Will's pretty sure there aren't any skill checks for letting the Mind Flayer reach out a cold limb and surround him, bear him up to see the hollow shadows of a silent Naperville. [Writing Rainbow - Blue treat for gloss.]

Into the Blue Again

For the prompts "Twisted and Fluffy Feelings" and "Consensual But Not Safe or Sane."

There's nothing too out of the ordinary in Naperville. No demodogs running around the high school, no creepy Russians spying on people, no electrical malfunctions in the kintchen. Not even El has powers, except the power to make Mike send letter after letter to her.

Nothing strange, except Will.

There's no gate to step through or power source to charge. No special place that means more or less to him—there hasn't been since he moved out. Maybe earlier, since he demolished Castle Byers in the rain.

But when he's alone and sure nobody's around, he just needs to focus a little, cross his eyes, and he's *there*. It's not dark and stormy anymore, and it doesn't have those weird noises in the wind. It's just cold. Like when he opens the refrigerator after a long day outside and there's a cold bottle of pop inside. The nice kind of cold.

The Mind Flayer is there, too. Except it's not really flaying minds, not now. It lets them be themselves.

"The other Billy taught me that," it muses. "How much more...compelling...it is, to have someone to speak with. Not a meeting of equals, but a meeting nonetheless."

"My name is not *Billy*," Will points out. "And not William, either." His dad called him William. Reason enough to ignore it.

"Yes, yes, Will. A will all your own."

Will's pretty sure there aren't any skill checks for letting the Mind Flayer reach out a cold limb and surround him, bear him up to see the hollow shadows of a silent Naperville. It's definitely not intelligent of him, and his strength is nothing next to the creature. He

doesn't really think he's charismatic enough for the Mind Flayer to care about *him*.

But maybe, deep down, he's still wise.

"Did you know?" he asks one day. "That I, uh. I don't like girls."

"Of course," the Mind Flayer says flippantly. "I know everything."

"But you're not...like...a boy?"

"I'm not anything you humans have words for. I am myself, and I choose you for your self. Let that be enough."

Will gets bored when it speaks in riddles. It can tell, probably, because it tries to make it up to him. Showing him visions of parts of the world he's never seen, deserted but for the eerie lights that mark no hours and cast no shadows. Letting him glimpse the mirror Hawkins, as Will squints to make out traces of his friends' movements in the world above. And wrapping its cold tendrils around him until he is paralyzed, limp, and utterly free. Free from the world, from responsibilities, from fear. From being possessed by something not himself. They are two, not one, and here in its grip Will knows it is vaster than he could ever be. Yet it claims him, wants him for its own.

"I need to go back," he always says in the end. When he is standing on sidewalks as gray and drab as the true city. "They need me."

Mom will be worried sick if he's gone too long. Jonathan needs a buddy, someone to listen to cool music with, someone who understands what they've both been through. And El, she needs a friend. A reminder that it's okay to be herself, powerful or isolated or both, no matter what they say. He perceives enough to know that, at least.

"Then go, little wise one," says the Mind Flayer. "When you are ready, I will be here."

"You promise?" Will pleads. He sounds like El in those moments, he knows, still a child in an alien world full of peculiarities he does not know firsthand.

Friends don't lie. The Mind Flayer isn't a friend, not exactly. But it's definitely not his enemy, either, and that was more than he could have hoped for just a few months ago.

"I promise. Someday you will not need me to let go."

Will smiles—it's a distant hope, but a hope all the same—and steps through to the warmth of reality.